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ABSTRACT

This document briefly examines the concept of "teacher centers," citing several definitions of the term based on functional emphases and preferences. A rationale for the existence of teacher centers includes the views that (1) fundamental reform in education must come from those charged with basic policy, and from teachers, (2) teachers are unlikely to change their ways of doing things just because they are told to, and (3) teachers will take reform seriously only when they are responsible for determining problems and needs, and for working toward solutions. The most urgent, current need in the teacher center movement is the training of teachers capable of bridging the theory-practice gap, particularly in areas relating to PL 94-142, requiring the provision of (1) inservice training for general and special education teachers, instructional and related services, and support personnel; (2) procedures ensuring a comprehensive staff development program to carry out PL 94-142 provisions, and (3) methods for the dissemination of information on handicapped child education methods. (MJB)

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TEACHER CENTERS AND P.L. 94-142 ~~92-142~~

A UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY FOR COOPERATION & RESOURCE UTILIZATION

M.S. Estle + C.R. Christensen

The teacher center is one of the hottest educational concepts on the scene today. Generally it takes over twenty years for an innovation to work its way into the mainstream of American education. However, in less than half a decade, the teacher center has become a well known locus for new approaches to educational personnel development.[1] The recognized successes of the British centers have given impetus to the development of American centers.

The teacher center concept is a multi-dimensional construct for which there is no one definition but only emphases and preferences. Definitions of various teacher centers may be stated as follows:

1. A meeting place for at least two people concerned with learning.

2. A demonstration of the intimate connection between teacher development and teacher education or in-service training.

3. A locale where theory and practice are integrated thereby making the two a single viable component of professional preparation and renewal.[2]

4. A vehicle which provides a means for coordinating the shared attempts of higher education, local school districts and practicing teachers to prepare prospective teachers and to renew professional skills of practicing teachers.

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[1]Schmeider, Allen A., Yarger, Sam J., Teacher Centers: Toward the State of the Scene, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education, Washington, D.C., University of South Florida, Tampa Leadership Training Institution for Educational Personnel Development. 1974.

[2]The Co-operative Teacher Center, (A concept Paper) The Illinois Office of Education, p. 1.

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5. A means for strengthening the relationship between the university and the classroom and a means for making the relationship more relevant.

6. A physical facility within a school where teachers can meet on a voluntary basis to share ideas related to their professional and personal lives. It is clearly one of the first efforts in this country to encourage teachers to develop, through participation, a community of learning and sharing within the schools.[3]

7. A place where the basic goal is the promotion of changes in the attitudes and behaviors of educational personnel (not just teachers) resulting in improved learning for children.[4]

8. Local physical facilities and self-improvement programs organized and run by the teachers themselves for purposes of upgrading educational performance. The primary function is to make possible a review of existing curricula and other educational practices by groups of teachers and to encourage teacher attempts to bring about changes.[5]

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[3]Fibkins, William, "The Whys and Hows of Teachers' Centers", Phi Delta Kappan, vol. 55, no. 8 (April, 1745), p. 467.

[4]Markowitz, Alan and Halley, Frances. The Advisory and Learning Exchange, The Sharing of Knowledge and Concerns. Profiles of Promise 14, National Institute of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C., ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies and Social Science Education, Boulder, Colorado: Social Science Education Consortium, Inc., Boulder, Colorado, 1973. (ED 095 071)

[5]Bailey, Stephen K. "Teachers' Centers: A British First", Phi Delta Kappan, vol. 53, no. 3 (November, 1971), p. 146.

9. Allen A. Schmieder[6] defines a teacher center as "a place, in situ or in changing locations, which develops programs for the training and improvement of educational personnel (in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, administrators, para-professionals, college teachers, etc.) in which the participating personnel have an opportunity to share successes, to utilize a wide range of educational resources and to receive training specifically related to their most pressing teaching problems".

A rationale for teachers centers can be stated:

1. Fundamental educational reform will come only through those charged with the basic educational policy and the teachers.

2. Teachers are not likely to change their ways of doing things just because they are told to do so.

3. Teachers will take reform seriously only when they are responsible for defining their own educational problems, delineating their own needs and receiving help on their own terms and at their own locations.

Essentially, the teacher center movement 'put the monkey of educational reform on the teachers' own backs. And they love it!

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[6]Schmieder, p. 6

It is estimated in a sampling conducted by the Syracuse Teacher Center Project[7] that there may be as many as 4,500 sites which see themselves as being associated with the teacher center movement in some manner. In another study by Emmitt Smith[8] of the Texas Teacher Center Program, it was determined that eighteen states have legislative or administrative provisions which relate to the establishing and/or supporting of teacher centers. It is a reasonable assumption that the movement is one of the most significant in current educational reform.

One of the trends in teacher centers is the building of training complexes which are jointly organized public schools, colleges, universities, community organizations and public agencies and which bring their resources together in a system which provides a place for university personnel, teachers, teachers in training, community members and technologists to meet and to determine activities in a collegial manner. Here the centers are free to employ a variety of training models which no single system can presently effect and which are responsive to and responsible for the individual needs of the co-operating systems.

The educational needs of the nation have changed markedly and dramatically and it is not possible for any single institution to be responsible for the training of teachers. The teacher center movement may be the forerunner of new institutional forms for a new kind of teacher training.

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[7]Yarger, Sam J. and Leonard, Albert, "A Descriptive and Analytical Study of the Teaching Center Movement in American Education". School of Education, Syracuse University, sponsored by the National Teacher Corps and the Office of Career Education of the United States Office of Education. May 1, 1974.

[8]Smith, Emmitt D., "The State of the States in Teacher Centering", The Journal of Teacher Education, vol. 25, no. 1, (Spring, 1974), p. 21-25.

The urgent need, at this point in time, is clinical training for teachers which can bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is suggested that this can be accomplished through a sharing of mutual goals and through co-operative efforts and more efficient use of human and fiscal resources by establishing a relationship of educators at the state, university and local school district levels. This co-ordinated effort would make better use of the specific expertise available at each level. Coordination, of course, will also be needed to fulfill the proposed regulations for P.L. 94-142, specifically in the sections relating to a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development. These sections require that each state provide:

a. Inservice training of general and special educational, instructional, related services, and support personnel;

b. Procedures to insure that all personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of the Act are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, and that activities sufficient to carry out this personnel development plan are scheduled; and

c. Effective procedures for acquiring and disseminating to teachers and administrators of programs for handicapped children significant information derived from educational research, demonstration and similar projects, and for adopting, where appropriate, promising educational practices and materials developed through those projects.[9]

(The proposed regulations' definition of "inservice training" means any training other than that received by an individual in a full-time program which leads to a degree.)

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9 Federal Register, Dept. of HEW, Office of Education, December 30, 1976, Part IV.

Local teacher centers could be a very effective link between the classroom teacher and federal and state facilities such as A.L.R.C., REMIS, and the newly proposed PDC (Professional Development Center) centers, state and university personnel, as well as a place to spotlight "local resources" such as special education teachers already within the districts.

For example, Glenview's Teacher Operated Center (TOC), which is beginning its fifth year of operation has offered several workshops and courses relating to the "special" student and the classroom teacher. On several occasions, the district's Learning Development teachers met with interested classroom teachers to share information and materials appropriate for the L.D. student and how these materials could be adopted for classroom use.

District social workers have offered a series of two-hour sessions dealing with divorce, illness, Separation and Death, and the implications of these crises for the classroom teacher.

In addition, several credit courses through a local university have been offered at the TOC relating to Cooperative Grouping, which also has implications for "mainstreaming" students.[10]

We have found success in viewing the teacher center as an inclusive, rather than exclusive, process and place, i.e., each person has something to give or get regardless of title or role in the district and/or community. This, too, is in the spirit of P.L. 94-142 - that "special" students have unique needs, but can also contribute to "regular" classrooms.

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[10]Johnson, D.W. & Johnson, R.T., Learning Together & Alone - Cooperation, Competition & Individualization Prentice Hill, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. p.92

As noted earlier, the label "teacher center" has many definitions. In Illinois, there are teacher centers staffed and supported by universities (Teacher Center Project, SIU), private foundations (The Teacher Center, Wilmette, Teachers Curriculum Work Center, Hyde Park, Educational Resource Center, Chicago), county and private funds (Maine Township Teacher Learning Center, Des Plaines), and those within and supported by local districts (Dist. #21 - Renewal Center, #25 - Arlington Heights Teacher Center, #34 - Teacher Operated Center, #59 The Teacher Reacher).

In spite of the diverse pattern of funding and staffing of teacher centers in Illinois, a commonality is that they are all involved in offering workshops for teachers and emphasize "concreteness and connection", especially relating to curriculum materials, ... "inventing or adapting curriculum materials with teachers, and helping teachers make use of the potent learning experiences in nature, homes and communities. In the teachers' centers' perspective, the curriculum development task is never ending and must be teacher-involving, especially where there are schools operating under social mandates for desegregation, "mainstreaming" mentally retarded into regular classrooms, or other forms of mixed-ability grouping".[11]

Because of other new legislation, P.L. #94-482, Part B., there will be funding available in 1978 for local districts to establish teacher centers in cooperation with institutions of higher education. Although the final regulations relating to this Act are not available at the time of this writing, the proposed regulations reflect some elements of successful teacher centers.[12]

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[11]Devany, K., "Surveying Teachers' Centers" (Teachers' Centers Exchange Occasional Paper #1) April, 1977 p.4.

[12]Federal Register, Dept. of HEW, Office of Education, November 22, 1976, Part V.

Rand investigators Berman and McLaughlin also found many of these key elements in successful federal projects. Some of the elements in successful change projects were:

1. Teachers were supported, not made to feel defensive, and were viewed as collaborators, not "targets".

2. Emphasized local inventions rather than implementation of "validated products".

3. Highly committed, energetic local leaders were involved, rather than outside experts.

4. A sufficient number of participants to make an impact on a school district and gain momentum, or what they describe as "critical mass".[13]

Considering these findings and our personal experience, it is the authors' feeling that the teacher center model provides an appropriate, effective process for professional growth and educational change - whether it be responding to the need for training or re-training large numbers of teachers to fulfill the requirements of P.L. 94-142 or the need of one teacher to develop alternative materials to teach place value.

For readers who would like more information about teacher centers, the following publications are available from The Teachers' Center Exchange, Far West Laboratories for Educational Research and Development, 1855 Folsom Street, San Francisco, California 94103: Exploring Teachers' Centers, ($6.00) Essays on Teachers' Centers, ($6.00) and the Teachers' Center Exchange Directory ($6.50)

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[13]Berman, P. & McLaughlin, M.W., Federal Programs Supporting Educational Change, Vol. IV., The Findings in Review, R-1589/4-HEW (Santa Monica, Calif. Rand Cooperative, April, 1975).

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